

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Conway Bridge  
other names/site number Nolichucky River Bridge; Bridge at Bird Hill; Birds Hill Bridge; Bridge at Conway Ferry

### 2. Location

street & number Briar Thicket Road/Knob Creek Road over the Nolichucky River NA ☐ not for publication  
city or town Briar Thicket ☒ vicinity  
state Tennessee code TN county Cocke & Greene code 059 & 029 zip code NA

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register.  
☐ See continuation sheet
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register.  
☐ See continuation sheet
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other,  
(explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Conway Bridge  
Name of Property

Cocke and Greene Counties  
County and State

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private  
☒ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☒ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

	buildings
	sites
1	structures
	objects
1	Total
0	

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

### Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/road-related (vehicular)

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/road-related (vehicular)

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: closed spandrel ribbed arch bridge

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation NA

walls NA

roof NA

other CONCRETE

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations N/A

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Engineering

Transportation

### Period of Significance

1925 - 1959

### Significant Dates

1925

### Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

NA

### Cultural Affiliation

NA

### Architect/Builder

Steel and Lebby Bridge Company

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☒ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Tennessee Department of Transportation

Conway Bridge

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Name of Property

## Cocke and Greene Counties

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### County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Less than one acre Rankin 172 SW

## UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>17</u>	<u>308750</u>	<u>4000006</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>17</u>	<u>308741</u>	<u>3999579</u>

3	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

## Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title	John T. Reese, Shelby Morris, Doralyn Short				
organization	NA			date	March 2009
street & number	10426 Sims Harris Road			telephone	423/344-3992
city or town	Ooltewah	state	TN	zip code	37363

## Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

## Continuation Sheets

## Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

## Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

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**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name See continuation sheet

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior  
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Cocke and Greene Counties, Tennessee

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## OWNERS

Iloff McMahan, Jr.  
Cocke County Mayor  
360 East Main Street  
Suite 146  
Newport, Tennessee 37821

Alan D. Broyles  
Greene County Mayor  
204 North Cutler Street  
Suite 206  
Greeneville, Tennessee 37745

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Cocke and Greene Counties, Tennessee

## DESCRIPTION

Conway Bridge is a graceful monolithic concrete arch bridge spanning the Nolichucky River. The Nolichucky River is the county line between Greene and Cocke counties, therefore, the bridge lies in both counties and was constructed as a jointly funded project between the two counties. This bridge, built by Steel and Lebbly Bridge Company in 1924-1925, is 16 feet wide and 414.5 feet long. The railing is a post and rail design. The out to out dimension, or the area outside the railing, is 17.1 feet. There are four closed spandrel ribbed arches along its length. The end arches arise from abutments on the banks of the river; there are three concrete piers in the river. The arches vary in length from 99.1 feet to 108.4 feet.<sup>1</sup>

The bridge is at river mile 21 and connects Briar Thicket Road, a rural Cocke County road formerly named Knob Creek Road, to TN State Route 340, a thoroughfare that parallels this section of the river on the north side. This segment of TN State Highway 340 is also named Fish Hatchery Road. The approximate half mile extension of Briar Thicket Road on the Greene County side of the bridge is still named Knob Creek Road.

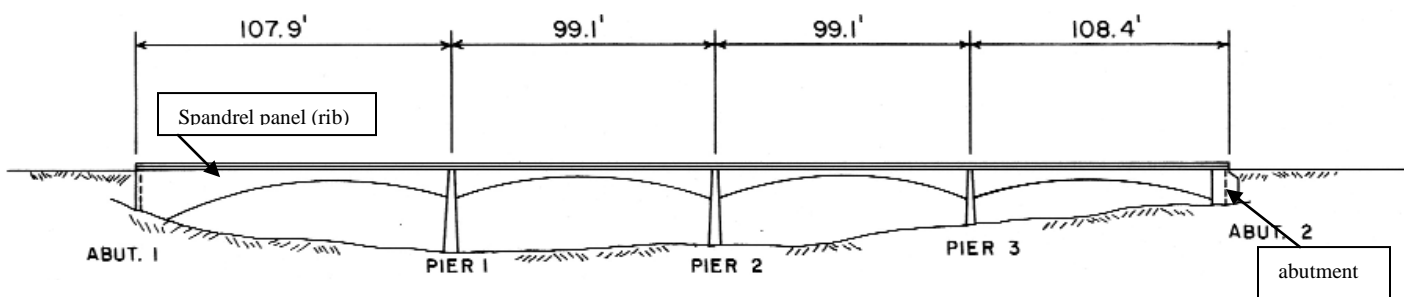
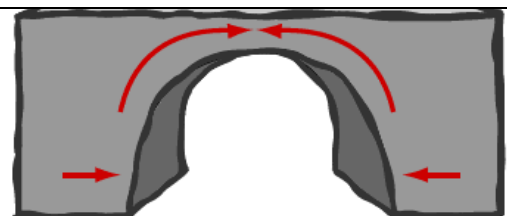


Figure 1. Conway Bridge from *Tennessee's Survey Report for Historic Highway Bridges*.

An arched bridge carries stress throughout, with the stress transferred through spandrels to the arches. Finally, the stress is transferred from the arches to abutments, where it is absorbed. Arches can be open or filled spandrel (barrel arch), with a variant being a filled spandrel ribbed arch like the Conway Bridge. A filled spandrel distributes stress uniformly, while an open spandrel distributes the stress down through a vertical column. The open spandrel arched bridge uses less material but

Figure 2. Arrows show the forces acting on the bridge. From [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/bridge/arch\\_forces.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/bridge/arch_forces.html) (accessed July 2, 2009)



<sup>1</sup> Martha Carver, *Tennessee's Survey Report for Historic Highway Bridges*, (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Company, 2008), 511.

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is labor intensive. The filled spandrel arched bridge is more economical for short spans.<sup>2</sup> (See Figures 5 & 2.)

The filled spandrel ribbed arch bridge form dates to circa 1898 in Pennsylvania. From the side, the bridge looks like a filled spandrel, solid barrel arch. However, the bridge is actually formed by parallel ribbed arches behind the filled spandrel, resulting in a hollow look from underneath.<sup>3</sup> (See photo 5.)

## Topography of Chucky Knobs

Geographical and geological features of the land such as hills and mountains, streams, and rivers often dictate how land is settled and utilized by its residents. The location of most communities is chosen because of the geography and terrain which surround them. The selection of railroad routes, modern roadways, and attendant stream crossings invariably follow the same pattern of development: first animal trails are adopted by man as footpaths; then these become early explorer routes; followed by rough pioneer oxen roads, which then become settlers's graded wagon roads; then resident ditched, graded, and graveled pikes; and finally the mechanically paved state and county roadways of modern times.

Stream crossings began as fords across shallow stretches and, where depth and width prevented, ferries were established. Crude bridges were built in many cases. Later, with the coming of the automobile and resulting improved roads, sophisticated and well-engineered bridges became the norm.

Such has been the pattern for development of a small group of tiny communities located in still rural Cocke County, Tennessee. These communities are found within the specific geographical area south of and encircled on three sides by the Nolichucky River. They are located within an area that has traditionally been called Chucky Knobs. A majority of these communities still exist: Bruners Grove, Briar Thicket, Glendale, High Point, Liberty Hill, Centerview, and others. Some are found on modern maps, others not. All lie in the long, narrow valleys of either Knob Creek or Slate Creek in the Chucky Knobs. (See Figure 3.)

Knowledge of the history and topography of Greene and Cocke counties is important to understanding of the role played by the Conway Bridge in the lives of the people it serves. Greene County shares the entire length of Cocke County's northeastern border, the upper portion of which is defined by the Nolichucky River. This border, a line running from southeast to northwest, was established when Cocke County was pulled out of Jefferson County in 1797.

Greene County's commercial, industrial, transportation, and educational systems began earlier than those of Cocke County. Those of Greene County were strongly influenced by travel up and down the Great Valley of Virginia and the portion of that valley that extends down into upper East Tennessee. Virtually all early travel, commerce, and immigration from the northeast were by way of this route. Thus, from earliest days, Greene

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 240-1.

<sup>3</sup> Carver, 242.

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County interests focused upon the region to their northwest border. Even today Interstate 81 follows the same general route taken by the pioneer immigrants to the region. As a result, both the Nolichucky River and Greene County served to somewhat isolate and insulate Cocke County from the influences of commerce up and down the Valley of Virginia.

The region of Chucky Bend north of the Nolichucky presents a striking contrast to the lands on the south side of the river. The land on the north side in Greene County consists of fertile river bottom lands which transition into level to rolling hills very suited for agricultural purposes. On the other hand the region of Chucky Bend which contains Chucky Knobs to the south in Cocke County is not so favorably formed.

Cocke County is of a rough triangular shape with three distinct regions. The apex of the triangle contains the northern segment of the county, studded with many steep hills. The middle of the triangle consists of river bottoms on each edge with randomly scattered hills in the center. The base of the triangle contains a mountainous region which forms Cocke County's portion of the Great Smoky Mountains northwest of the North Carolina state line.

The northern segment of Cocke County containing the Chucky Knobs region can best be described as an area of densely packed ridge and hill studded terrain with long, deep valleys carved out by small streams. The hill and ridge formations rarely exceed 200-300 feet in elevation above the valleys.

Chucky Knobs consists of four major valley areas drained by four creeks. They are known as Clay Creek, Clear Creek, Slate Creek, and Knob Creek. Clay Creek drains into the French Broad River near Newport. Clear Creek also drains into the French Broad River by way of the Pigeon River. Slate Creek drains into the Nolichucky near Jones Bridge, while Knob Creek drains into the Nolichucky River near Conway Bridge. (See Figure 3).<sup>4</sup>

Clay Creek and Clear Creek valleys are somewhat less steep, are closer to Newport and, therefore, had better roads much earlier than Slate Creek and Knob Creek valleys. But Slate Creek also benefited from better roads and a bridge earlier than Knob Creek. A road (later TN State Route 160) was built through Slate Creek Valley to connect Newport with Morristown, in Hamblen County. About 1900, a ford or ferry had been used to cross the Nolichucky at that point until construction of Jones Bridge sometime prior to 1913.

Claborn points out in his pictorial history of Hamblen County that the Bend of Chucky included lands on both sides of the river; that is, in both Hamblen and Cocke counties. He states "The Bend of Chucky domain included almost all of the land up the Nolichucky River to a point near the Greene County line. Included was most of the Bend area on both the north and south sides of the river extending inland to the Springvale community. McFarland and Outlaw were said to have made a corn crop near the Bend in 1782."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Clay and Clear creeks are south of the area shown on the map in Figure 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Claborn and William Henderson, *Hamblen County TN: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach VA: Donning Co Publishers, 1995), 155.



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Claborn's note of a corn crop planted in 1782 by these two former North Carolina residents establishes that settlement in the area had begun by the 1780s. Alexander Outlaw remained with the corn crop while McFarland returned to Carolina to fetch the families of both men. The families subsequently settled in the Bend about two miles west of the river.

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Cocke and Greene Counties, Tennessee

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The 1925 Conway Bridge across the Nolichucky River in Cocke and Greene counties is being nominated to the National Register under criteria A and C for its local significance in transportation and engineering. Under criterion A, the bridge is significant for the role it played in providing the inhabitants of the rural area better access to the region. The region, known as Chucky Knobs, consists of several small stream watersheds. Prior to the construction of the bridge, the only way to cross the Nolichucky was by ferry at this site. With the completion of the Conway Bridge, residents of the Chucky Knobs area had improved access to other areas of Cocke and Greene counties. The bridge connects several small rural communities in the Chucky Knobs section of Cocke County to their closest commercial center, the community of Warrensburg in Greene County, located about three miles distant from Conway Bridge. At the time the bridge was built it provided the most direct and reliable means of access to the amenities and necessities of life that a larger town could provide. Located as it was on one of the early trails through the county, Warrensburg had become an early trading center.<sup>6</sup> The first concrete bridge built in Cocke County, the Conway Bridge is also being nominated as a significant representation of a closed spandrel ribbed arch bridge by the Steel and Lebbby Bridge Company. The bridge has had few changes since its construction and retains its integrity.<sup>7</sup>

Known variously as the bridge at Bird Hill, Birds Hill Bridge, Bridge at Conway Ferry, and the Nolichucky River Bridge, the bridge has been known locally as the Conway Bridge and in 1935 it showed up on USGS maps as Conway Bridge. Greene and Cocke counties often referred to the bridge by different names. The historic preferred name of the bridge is Conway Bridge.

## Early Transportation History of the Area

The Nolichucky River begins in North Carolina and flows through a deep gorge in the Unaka Mountains into Tennessee where it enters the French Broad River below Morristown in Hamblen County. The entire river valley is subject to sudden and violent rains producing great floods, while in the winter the ice moving downstream sometimes forms ice dams.<sup>8</sup> Crossing the Nolichucky River in the area between Lick Creek and Little Chucky Creek was always difficult. Small river craft were unreliable in the currents, even during low water, and crossing the rapid current during high water levels was next to impossible. "From Beulah up to Bird Hill, a distance of five or six miles, the valley opens out into a kind of flood plain basin, at whose lower end, just below Beulah, the hills close in and constrict the river. During floods the lower portion of this tract has acted like a settling basin. The current in the middle and upper part of this stretch was strong enough to

<sup>6</sup> Harry B. Roberts, "Warrensburg - A Community With a Glorious Past," *Olden Times in Greene County, TN*. Vol. I. (1980), 113-115.

<sup>7</sup> As part of TDOT's historic bridge survey, the TN SHPO and TDOT have a consensus determination that the bridge is eligible for listing in the National Register under criterion C.

<sup>8</sup> US Department of the Interior Geological Survey, *Surface Water Supply of the United States 1907-8 Part i. North Atlantic Coast, 61 Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, House of Representatives Document No. 172*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 142-143.

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do much injury to lands on both sides.”<sup>9</sup>

What probably began as a private boat or raft used to connect the Joseph Conway family living on the south side of the river with family members on the north side was eventually used to ferry friends and neighbors across the river as well.<sup>10</sup> It grew into a commercial venture and became known as Conway Ferry and was the only way to cross the river in this area. Ferries were the most common form of river crossing although there were bridges in the area. Before 1900 most of the bridges built across the Nolichucky River were of wood construction. A particularly devastating flood swept through the area in the winter of 1900-1901 washing away most of the bridges along the Nolichucky River. Replacing them was a tedious process and still not completed when the 1920s brought a bridge building bonanza to Greene County. This increase in bridge building was due in part to the coming of the automobile, which allowed people more mobility and heightened the demand for better roads. The Greene County Court Minutes show that in July 1924 the road commissioner recommended the construction of twelve new bridges, including one at Bird Hill, which was to be built in partnership with Cocke County. According to Tennessee State law, when a bridge was necessary over any creek or river that divided one county from another, the legislative body of each county shall join in an agreement for building, keeping, and repairing it, and the charge shall be defrayed by both counties in proportion to the number of taxable polls in each county.<sup>11</sup>

## Conway Bridge

In the July 7, 1924, Greene County Court Minutes it is noted that the Bird Hill Bridge was authorized to be constructed as soon as practical. The Greene County road commission was to join with Cocke County in its construction, with both counties sharing the cost of this bridge. If the Cocke County Court at its July 1924 term did not appropriate the money for the construction of one-half the cost of this bridge, Greene County's appropriation for the bridge would be voided. The bridge was to be constructed of steel or concrete or both and the contract for the material and construction of the bridge would be let after competitive bids were received. The Cocke County Court did not appropriate money for the bridge at its July term, thus voiding the Greene County appropriation bill. However, the Cocke County Court ordered a study to look into building the bridge. J.E. Bible, chair of the study committee, states in the feasibility study report to the Cocke County Court in 1924.

We your committee, after investigation do find, that a public Bridge, like other Public

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<sup>9</sup> Leonidas Chalmers Glenn, *United States Geological Survey Professional Paper No. 72, Denudation and Erosion in the Southern Appalachian Region and the Monongahela Basin*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 43-44.

<sup>10</sup> Conway Bridge was named for the Joseph Conway and for his brothers, a group of Revolutionary War soldiers who settled along the Nolichucky River between Lick Creek and Little Chucky Creek after the war. In all, the brothers and their sons numbered more than twenty-five men named Conway who lived along the Nolichucky before 1800. As a family they were civic minded leaders who made immeasurable contributions to the establishment and growth of the early settlement and early governments of East Tennessee. Some of their names are recorded in the history books of the region today but even more of them have gone unrecognized.

<sup>11</sup> TENN Code Ann. 54-11-203, "Bridges to be made by two counties - Apportionment of Cost," (Code 1858).

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improvements; (sic) must be so situated as to be easily accessible to the general Public, and on good roads at leading Roadways, between counties or business sections, divided by impassible water courses. Such we find are the conditions at Conways Ferry near Birds Hill.... The urgent necessity for a Bridge at that place is apparent to anyone who has traveled that Road. The section on both sides of the River are level, being an easy way for travel and traffic, which is becoming immense.... Locally there is a greater need for a Bridge being situated so far from town (15 miles from Newport) they are practically isolated from medical aid which is costly in any event and when it has to come from 15 to 20 miles is in many cases impossible. The same can be said of High School for their children. They are the most of them very near an excellent High School (Warrensburg) and the attendance of their children are often interrupted by high water, ice and many other inconveniences. While the Proposed Bridge would place them on an equal footing with other communities of the county and without which, many of their children cannot have the advantage of a high school education. Fourth and last, but by no means least is the Church organization, Greene County being an older settlement the church being organized at Warrensburg with latter an arm on this side of the River and as you can see that many of these our people, are for at least a part of each year deprived of the service of their church.

Bible continues to explain in his report that

The Ferry at Conways is about to be discontinued after more than 60 years duration. It is now and has long been operated at a loss and with the increased cost of boat building and upkeep to make it a paying proposition would be to place the price of Ferriage at an almost impossible figure.

He goes on to explain that the people of the third district have not asked for a bridge at Conway Ferry for the last half a century because of the increase in taxation a bridge would bring.

These people seem to have awakened to the fact that poor highways are the highest taxes that any people can pay.<sup>12</sup>

At their October 1924 meetings, the courts of both counties approved funding for the new Bird Hill Bridge across the Nolichucky River. The Newport *Plain Talk* ran an article on October 7, 1924 that stated "An appropriation was voted not to exceed nine thousand dollars to pay one-half the expense of erecting a bridge across Nolachucky river at (sic) Conway's ferry. Greene County voted a similar appropriation to build the other half of the bridge."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> J.E. Bible, *Bridge at Conways Ferry - Report of Committee*, October 26, 1924, Cocke County Court Clerk Minutes, Vol. 11, pp. 536-538. TSLA Microfilm Roll A-544.

<sup>13</sup> "Proceedings of Cocke County Court," Newport *Plain Talk*, October 7, 1924, TSLA Microfilm.

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In July of the following year (1925) the *Plain Talk* reported that the bridge being built at Conway Ferry would be finished in about thirty days. Cocke County's portion of the cost would amount to \$8,998 with a similar amount to be paid by Greene County. The bridge committee, composed of people from both counties, consisted of J.U. Brown, J.H. Moore, J.D. Holdway, and H.L. Davis.

The Cocke County Court Minutes record the following contract between Steel and Lebby, bridge builders, and a joint Greene County-Cocke County bridge committee:

Contract for the Bridge at Conway's Ferry. This agreement made and entered into in triplicate on this the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of Dec. 1924 by and between John A. Steel, Jr. and Thomas D. Lebby, a partnership composed of John Steel, Jr. and Thomas D. Lebby of Knox County, Tenn, their successors, executors, executors, administrators and assigns, parties of the first part, and J.D. Holdway Sr., J.H. Moore, and H.L. Davis of Cocke County Tennessee, and J.U. Brown of Greene County Tennessee, acting as a joint bridge committee, for Cocke County and Greene County, Tennessee, parties of te(sic) second part.

WITNESSETH: That for consideration of the payments hereinafter mentioned to be made by parties of the second part, parties of the first part agree to furnish and deliver (sic) all materials, equipment, tools, machinery, and labor and furnish and deliver all materials required to be furnished at site of the work, and to well and truly, pay for all such equipment machinery, tools, material and labor and to construct for parties of the second part, a reinforced concrete bridge across the Nolachuckey (sic) River, connecting the counties of Green and Cocke at Conway Ferry, said bridge to be 415 total length over all with a 16 feet runway, designed and constructed to support a concentrated load of 40 tons.

The bridge to be constructed under this contract is the one designated (plan "A") revised in the proposal of the parties of the first part, this December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1924, and is to be built in strict conformity with the provisions of this contract and the plan and specifications. The said plans, specifications, and proposals are attached hereto and are hereby made a part of this agreement as fully and to the same effect as if the same had been set forth at length in the body of this agreement.

In consideration of the foregoing promises the party of the second part agrees to pay to the parties of the first part the sum of \$16,898.00 upon completion and acceptance of the bridge by the joint bridge committee, said payment to be made in cash or its equivalent, upon test as mentioned above, which shall be the acceptance of this committee.

It is distinctly understood and agreed that the party of the second part is to pay for extra foundations and excavations made or mentioned in this contract below the elevation shown on the plans at the stipulated prices set forth in the specifications and in no wise shall there be

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any extras to come in or to be paid for in the construction of this bridge other than these stipulated herein and mentioned, It is definitely and explicitly understood that a reciprocity shall be used or effective in this contract to the extent that in case one foundation exceed a greater depth than that set out in this contract and that another should not reach the specified depth that the contents of one shall be balanced against that of the other, yet under no circumstances will there be any diminution of the lump sum base of the contract.

This committee composed of Cocke and Greene counties agree to employ a competent engineer who shall act at their direction and at a price agreed upon between the engineer and the committee. In the acceptance of this bridge it will be understood with all parties that the engineers acting shall constitute jointly an acting member of the committee. With this contract is to be furnished by party of the first part a complete and solvent bond made by some surety company of Tennessee, equal to the price herein set out \$16,898.00 to be in full force and effect for the period of time of 12 months from date of the completion and acceptance of the bridge.

In agreement to all the terms of the contract, plans, proposals and specifications, the contracting parties hereby set their hands and seals, on this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of December 1924.

(Signed)  
John D. Steele (sic), Jr.  
Thomas D. Lebby – Parties of first part  
J. U. Brown of Greene County  
J. D. Holdway Sr.  
J.H. Moore  
H. L. Davis – Parties of the second part<sup>14</sup>

J.A. Bible donated land for an access road to the proposed Conway Bridge. In an October 1925 meeting of the Greene County government, the county reiterated the appropriation approval from the preceding October obligating the county to pay half the construction cost of Bird Hill Bridge. It was noted that the bridge had now been completed and accepted by the committee and the present Supervisor of Roads for Greene County and also by the authorities of Cocke County.<sup>15</sup> Greene County's cost of the bridge amounted to \$12,700.76. A resolution was adopted to pay the amount due to Steel and Lebby, contractors, out of any general Bridge Fund of Greene County. If sufficient funds were not available, warrants in the denomination of \$500 were to

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<sup>14</sup> *Cocke County Court Minutes, Volume 12*, January 5, 1925. pp 17-18. Note: The minutes contained numerous typos and misspellings, most of which have been corrected in this transcription.

<sup>15</sup> Greene County, *Court Minute Book 49*, October 5, 1925, pp. 245-246, 309, 520-521, Greene County Courthouse, Greeneville TN

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be issued.<sup>16</sup>

The Greeneville *Democrat-Sun* newspaper reported in its November 18, 1925, edition that the Greene County Quarterly Court had passed a resolution appropriating \$35,000 for building Bird's and Easterly's bridges and for authorizing the issuance of time warrants to pay for building one-half of a bridge across Nolichucky River between the Counties of Cocke and Greene.

I will on Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup> 1925, offer for sale the warrants of said county, in the office of the County Chairman in the Court House in Greeneville Tennessee at 1 o'clock ... Said appropriations of the Quarterly Court of said county and the resolution directing the issuance of and warrants were made for the purpose of constructing or paying for the construction of bridges at what is known as Bird's Bridge and at Easterly's Ferry in said county across the Nolichucky River and for one-half the cost of construction of the bridge across the river at Bird's Hill. This November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1925. M.P. Humphreys, Vice Chairman.<sup>17</sup>

Conway Bridge is more than just a bridge to residents of Cocke and Greene counties. The bridge, named Nolichucky River Bridge, but traditionally called Conway Bridge for the early settlers of the same name, represents a culmination in the growth and development of these communities in Knob Creek Valley. Once built, in 1925, the bridge became an important part of the lives of the local citizenry. (See Figure 6.)

## Steel and Lebby Bridge Company<sup>18</sup>

In the first part of the twentieth century, the Luten Bridge Company was the premier designer and builder of concrete arch bridges throughout the nation, primarily designing traditional barrel arch or filled spandrel arch bridges. In the post WWI years, new types of concrete arches were being used and more companies began competing with Luten to design and build concrete arch bridges. The Steel and Roehl Bridge Company, and the later Steel and Lebby Bridge Company, both of Knoxville, are examples of these new companies that specialized in concrete arch bridges.

John Steel partnered with Otto Roehl from the late teens to circa 1924. When this company dissolved, Steel formed a partnership with Thomas Lebby – the Steel and Lebby Bridge Company – which lasted until financial difficulties in 1933. Like Steel's earlier company, this Knoxville-based company specialized in concrete arch bridges, although they also built truss bridges. The company mainly worked in the Southeast US. Both firms that Steel was involved in used a variety of concrete bridge designs such as the open spandrel arch (1921 Rainbow Bridge in Greene County) and the through arch bridge (1920s Lawrence County bridge, gone). "This firm significantly expanded the range of concrete arch design in Tennessee,

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<sup>16</sup> Records for the exact amount paid by Cocke County have not been found.

<sup>17</sup> "Notice of Sale of County Warrants," Greeneville *Democrat-Sun*, November 18, 1925, TSLA Microfilm. The bridge at Easterly's Ferry is entirely in Greene County.

<sup>18</sup> Carver, 205-208.

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playing a major role in the transition from traditional concrete arch designs that imitated masonry arches to a more innovative use of concrete.”<sup>19</sup> Steel was the main bridge designer and company salesman, while Lebby concentrated on construction, field work, and overall supervision. Their construction work earnings reached a high of about \$500,000 and they employed 25 to 300 people every year.<sup>20</sup> Nine of the bridges the company erected are still standing in East Tennessee.

North Carolina native Steel (1892-1980) was an apprentice with the American Bridge Company around 1909, studied at Trinity College (Duke University), received a civil engineering degree from the University of Minnesota, and attended the Ecoles Ponts et Chaussées (School of Bridges and Causeways). He was a combat pilot during WWI and volunteered for ground service during WWII. After the bank holding Steel and Lebby’s capital collapsed in 1933, Steel farmed for a time, but eventually worked for another company doing construction.

Lebby (1896-1951) was born in South Carolina, graduated from the College of Charleston, and received a mechanical engineering degree from both Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University in 1917. Specializing in electrical and naval engineering, he was in the Navy for two years. Lebby was a partner in an engineering firm, Williams and Lebby, in Mississippi from 1919-1923 after which he partnered with Morgan and Tate of Knoxville for around a year. His partnership with Steel began in April of 1924. When Steel and Lebby was forced to close, Lebby applied for a job with the new Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). His stated reason for leaving his last job was “DEPRESSION.” He got a job with TVA and ended up becoming the Chief of the Construction and Maintenance Branch of TVA in Chattanooga.

## Additional Background

While transportation and communication were limited for settlers on either side of the river, the Conway Bridge was especially important to those living inside the bend of the Nolichucky River, and further south into the Chucky Knobs in Cocke County.

The Slate Creek valley (through which the forerunner of State Route 160 ran) benefited from a bridge much earlier than did the Knob Creek valley. Knob Creek is a small stream which rises in the vicinity of Bruner’s Grove and empties into the Nolichucky River from the south bank at the southeast leg of the Bend of Chucky. Slate Creek rises near Liberty Hill and flows into the Nolichucky River from the south bank at the southwest leg of the Bend of Chucky. These two valleys, formed by their respective streams and not formally named, comprise virtually all of the land encircled by the Bend of Chucky. Ferry crossings were established (and later the Jones and Conway bridges were built) near the point where each creek empties into the Nolichucky. Replacing a nearby ferry, the old Jones Bridge connected the Slate Creek settlements to Morristown in adjacent Hamblen County.

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<sup>19</sup> Carver, 205.

<sup>20</sup> Carver, 207.



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Until Conway Bridge was built, access to Warrensburg from Chucky Knobs and Knob Creek Valley was by Conway Ferry. Cocke County records suggest the ferry was operated as a commercial venture or privately-owned public ferry at least as early as the Civil War. In the early 1880s Catherine Conway, then 17 years old, operated her father's ferry on the Nolichucky below Bird Hill. The Conway Ferry used ropes across the river to maintain a course; if the water was high, Catherine took people across in a skiff.<sup>21</sup> Few records exist concerning Conway Ferry. Most of the history surrounding the ferry can only be obtained from traditional stories related by those who have local knowledge. Not until the two bridges crossing to the north side of Nolichucky were built did the Bend of Chucky residents have dependable year-round transportation.

Edward Walker's *Cocke County Tennessee* relates many of the early difficulties encountered in traveling through Cocke County. Railroad was the preferred method of travel; horseback was possible but depended on road and weather conditions. River crossings were by ferries or fords. Walker writes of traveling from Newport; travel conditions were even bleaker for other Chucky Knob settlements.<sup>22</sup> Daniel Ellis in his *Thrilling Adventures* spoke of the challenge of crossing through the area of Chucky Knobs as he traveled from the Little Pigeon and French Broad rivers toward Chucky River near Parrottsville (Cocke County) during the Civil War. He complained "After taking an early breakfast I set out for another hard day's travel in the direction of Chucky river. (sic) I was all day engaged in crossing over stupendous river-knobs, and when the gloom of night came I was still in the knobs ..."<sup>23</sup> In *The Tennessee Hand Book* Herman Bokum described the Chucky Knobs as a peculiar feature ten miles long and five miles wide having the appearance of potato hills.<sup>24</sup> (See Figure 4.)

It is difficult to imagine the isolation that faced rural families even several decades into the 1900s. Before the days of television and telephone, the rural farmer's main links to the outside world were the letters and newspapers that came by mail to the nearest post office. Since the farmer had to pick his mail up at the post office, this often meant a full day's travel round trip. Travel by ferries was quicker than land routes, but still had limitations. The first experimental rural free delivery routes were not begun until 1896.<sup>25</sup> Free rural mail service officially became a part of the post office about ten years later but it would be more years still before rural mail delivery was realized in the most remote communities.

The Tennessee General Assembly passed a bill in 1901 (1901 Tenn. Pub. Acts Chap. 136, Sec. 1-14) that authorized the formation of county road districts, appointment of a County Road Commissioner, District Road Commissioners, classification and standards for county roads, and numbering and mapping of county roads. While they created the commissioner offices, it was not until July 1913 that Cocke County

<sup>21</sup> Greene County History Book Committee, *Historic Greene County Tennessee and its People, 1783-1992*, (np, 1984), 304.

<sup>22</sup> Edward R. Walker III, "How difficult Was it to get to Morristown?" *Cocke County Tennessee*. (Charleston: The History Press, 2007), 72.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Ellis, *Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis, The Great Union Guide of East Tennessee*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1867), 218. Reprinted by Overmountain Press (1989).

<sup>24</sup> Hermann Bokum, *The Tennessee Hand-Book and Immigrants Guide: Giving a Description of the State of Tennessee: 1868*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1868), 23.

<sup>25</sup> United States Postal Service. *History of the Post Office*. Accessed 21 December 2008: <http://www.ceol.com/vvpo/history.html>

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implemented other portions of the Act. As can be seen from the Cocke County Court Minutes, there were no designated county roads in the Bend of Chucky or Chucky Knobs area until 1913.<sup>26</sup>

The Knob Creek Valley residents were not as fortunate as those in the Slate Creek valley. It was not until 1925 that Knob Creek had a bridge. The nearest populated area which could provide them with a high school, churches, medical care, and commercial markets was only about three miles away in Warrensburg *but* was across the river in Greene County. "By 1913 Warrensburg had become an education center for lower Greene County and adjacent areas in Cocke and Hamblen Counties.... For years students from many miles around came and boarded in private homes to attend Warrensburg High School."<sup>27</sup>

A former Bend of Chucky resident tells of the struggle her family endured to obtain an education

My Dad was born in 1913 and he had three older sisters who were determined to get an education. While they were in the early grades, they rode a pony cart to the old Lowland school in Hamblen County which was about five or six miles from their home in Sawyer Hollow, crossing the old Jones Bridge. When they finished all the grades offered there, they boarded during the school year in the home of Jehu S. Sawyer and Catherine Conway Sawyer in Warrensburg and attended high school there. Once they arrived in Warrensburg, they stayed until the end of the term before going home unless some emergency occurred requiring their presence. The oldest girl was 18 years old in 1925 when Conway Bridge was built so obviously they had to use the ferry to get to Warrensburg from Sawyer Hollow which was quite a trek.<sup>28</sup>

Conway Bridge provided many residents of Chucky Knobs timely and reliable access to their means of livelihood, their farmland located on the opposite bank of the river. It did not flood or wash away in times of high water as many of the neighboring bridges did. The land on the north bank of the Nolichucky is rich fertile bottom land for several miles while most of that on the south side in Cocke County tended to be more rugged. The higher land was not as useful as farmland but did not tend to flood as the bottom lands on the opposite bank did. Many of the early settlers in Bend of Chucky lived on the south side of the river but owned farms on the other side in Greene County.

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<sup>26</sup> *Cocke County Court Clerk Minutes*, Vol. 10 (1913-1918), pp.59-61.

<sup>27</sup> Harry B. Roberts, "Warrensburg - A Community With a Glorious Past," *Olden Times in Greene County, TN* Vol. I. (1980), 114

<sup>28</sup> Shelby Morris, Cartersville Georgia. Email to authors.

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## Maps

United States Geological Survey. 7 ½ Minute Quadrangle Maps, Springvale 172 NW, Mohawk 172 NE, Parrottsville 172 SE, Rankin 172 SW, Cedar Creek 181 SW, Davy Crockett Lake 181 SE.

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## Newspapers

*Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, Greeneville, TN. 1924-25 editions on microfilm, Tennessee State Library & Archives, Nashville, TN.

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*Newport Plain Talk*, Newport, TN. 1924-25 editions on microfilm, Tennessee State Library & Archives, Nashville, TN.

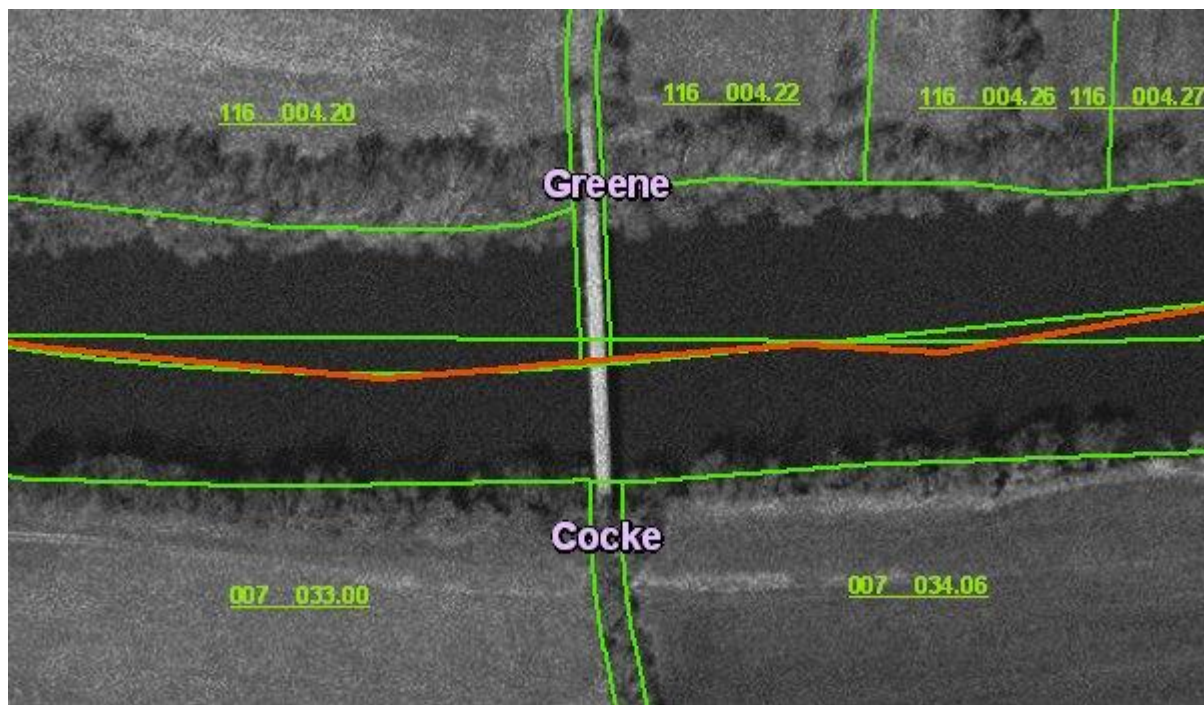
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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

The Conway Bridge is located across the Nolichucky River in Cocke and Greene counties. The nominated property consists of the length and width of the bridge and its footprint.



42'

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### PHOTOS

Photo by: Shelby Morris  
Date: February 7 and April 4, 2008  
Negatives/digital image: Tennessee Historical Commission

View of east elevation, facing northwest (from Cocke County)  
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View of east elevation, facing northwest (from Cocke County)  
2 of 8

Oblique view of east elevation, facing southwest (from Greene County)  
3 of 8

Oblique view of east elevation, facing southwest (from Greene County)  
4 of 8

Oblique view of west elevation and underside, facing southeast (from Greene County)  
5 of 8

Oblique view of west elevation, facing southeast (from Greene County)  
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Oblique view of east elevation, facing north-northwest (from Cocke County)  
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View of bridge roadway, facing north-northeast (from Cocke County)  
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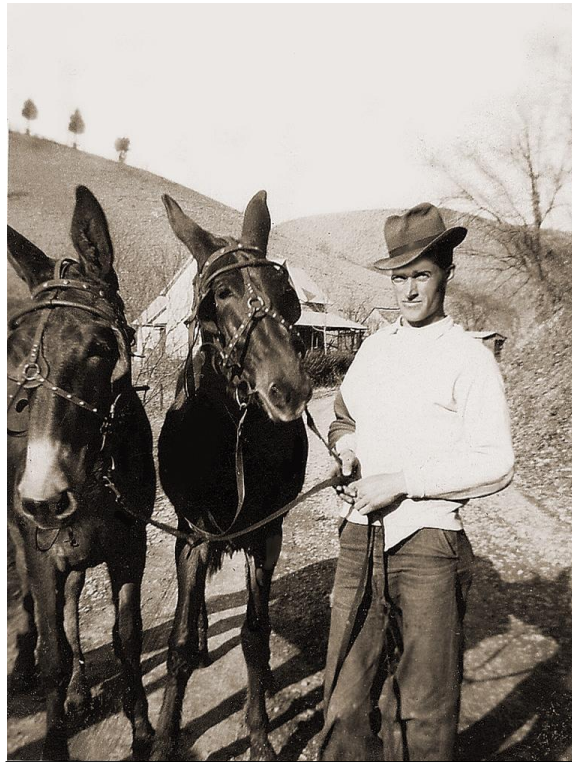


Figure 4. 1940s photo of Clyde Sawyer showing Chucky Knobs in the background.

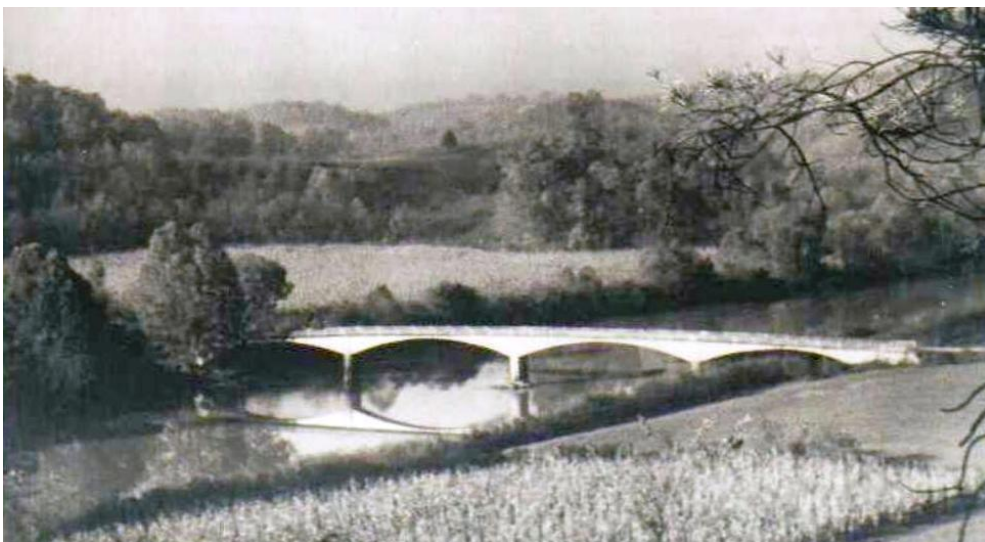


Figure 5. Undated photo of Conway Bridge. Photo courtesy of Don Bible.



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Figure 6. Clyde and Babe (Baker) Sawyer pose on the Conway Bridge on their wedding day, October 5, 1935.

